Terrorism, Hegel, Honneth*

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Abstract: My essay begins by analyzing how Hegel and Honneth's theory of recognition would seem to lend support to insurgent terrorists' struggle for the right to self-determination. Insurgent terrorism often looks like a concretization of what Honneth calls the moral protest of the oppressed launched against the dominating powers. Insurgent terrorism also bears affinity to the politics of recognition in the sense that it challenges the legitimacy and authority of the forces owned by the state, and seeks to gain public recognition instead for the legitimacy of their own cause. Precisely because what matters uppermost to terrorists is the gaining of recognition for their cause as just, terrorists are eager to seize the mass media as a means of spreading their ideas. My essay will end, however, by pointing out major differences between insurgent terrorism on the one hand, and Hegel and Honneth on the other.

Keywords: colonialism and decolonization, imagined community, insurgent, recognition, subaltern, state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

Resumen: Mi trabajo empieza analizando cómo el pensamiento de Hegel y la teoría del reconocimiento de Honneth pudieran aparecer como apoyo conceptual en la lucha terrorista por el derecho de autodeterminación. El terrorismo a menudo puede tomar la apariencia de lo que Honneth llama la protesta moral de los oprimidos contra los poderes dominantes. El terrorismo, igualmente, muestra afinidad con

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la política del reconocimiento en tanto pone en cuestión la legitimidad y la autoridad de los poderes del Estado, y trata de ganar el reconocimiento público en favor de la legitimidad de su propia causa. Precisamente porque el gran objetivo del terrorismo es captar el reconocimiento para su causa como causa justa, los terroristas se afanan por ganarse a los medios de comunicación con el objeto de expandir sus ideas. Mi trabajo concluye, sin embargo, señalando diferencias fundamentales entre el terrorismo y el pensamiento de Hegel y Honneth.

Palabras clave: Colonialismo y descolonización, comunidad imaginada, insurgente, reconocimiento, subalterno, monopolio del uso legítimo de la fuerza por parte del Estado.

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Before I proceed, let me clarify that it is not the intention of this paper to argue for or against terrorism. Rather, my agenda is to analyze what motivates insurgent terrorism from the viewpoint of the politics of recognition. I adopt the expression "politics of recognition" from Charles Taylor's essay of the same name and Axel Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition*.[1] Both Taylor and Honneth believe that "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves".[2] When talking about misrecognition, Taylor and Honneth have foremost in their minds the injustices faced by subaltern groups. For both of them, subaltern groups' protest against misrecognition or humiliation is a moral necessity. In the interest of space, I can only focus on one of these two thinkers, and I have chosen to concentrate on Honneth's theory —especially as it is influenced by Hegel's master/slave dialectic. I will begin by analyzing how Hegel and Honneth's theory of recognition would seem to lend support to insurgent terrorists' struggle for the right to self-determination. I will end, however, by pointing out major differences between insurgent terrorism on the one hand, and Hegel and Honneth on the other.

Axel Honneth's most important contribution to social theory is perhaps his interpretation of the demands of new social movements in terms of a moral claim rather than as an interest claim for any particular group. Honneth shifts the basis for revolt and resistance from the material to the moral, hence the subtitle of his book —"The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts". In his "Reply to Andreas Kalyvas". Honneth further explains the significance of his transformation of Marxism in discussing social struggle: "it is in general more meaningful to assume the experience of disrespect or humiliation as motivational cause for protest and resistance instead of presupposing, as was common in Marxist theory for a long time, the (utilitarian) dynamic of injured interests".[3] Honneth

1 Axel Honneth. (1995). *Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Oxford: Polity Press.

2 Charles Taylor. (1994). "Politics of Recognition", in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p. 25.

3 Axel Honneth. (1999). "Reply to Andreas Kalyvas, 'Critical Theory at the Crossroads: Comments on Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition'", *European Journal of Social Theory,* 2: p. 250.

argues that subaltern groups ought to protest against unfair treatment, not so much in response to their injured interests, as in response to their moral expectations being violated —expectations which are based on a tacit understanding of the respect an individual or group deserves qua being part of the human community. Honneth derives his idea from the young Hegel for whom social conflicts are animated by moral impulses rather than mere instincts for self-preservation, by intersubjective dynamics rather than individual subjects' raw biology. According to Honneth, such struggle for mutual recognition "generate[s] inner-societal pressure toward the practical, political establishment of institutions that would guarantee freedom".[4]

I. Struggle for recognition according to Honneth

For Honneth, human beings' self-worth and self-realization are dependent on recognition from others. He differentiates among three kinds of recognition: the recognition through love, through rights or law, and through solidarity. Recognition from loved ones gives one self-confidence. Through rights, one is recognized as possessing equal dignity and worth as other human beings before the law. Last but not least, communities with shared values provide frameworks within which particular individuals can gain social esteem. Social conflicts arise when individuals are denied any one of these recognitions. As Joel Anderson points out, "The 'grammar' of such struggles is 'moral' in the sense that the feelings of outrage and indignation driving them are generated by the rejection of claims to recognition and thus imply normative judgements about the legitimacy of social arrangements".[5]

II. Insurgent terrorists struggle for recognition

The two kinds of recognition most relevant for the study of terrorism are recognition through rights and solidarity —but particularly recognition through rights. Since legal recognition is a much more complicated issue, I will begin with the issue of solidarity and then work my argument back to the topic of legal recognition.

II.a. Solidarity

Terrorists usually belong to some kind of organization and derive

4 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

5 Joel Anderson (1995), "Translator's Introduction", in Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts.* Oxford: Polity Press, p. xii.

their identity from being part of that group. There exists among members of the same organization a fraternal spirit which binds together group members who are united in their commitment to the same ideal and their similar predicament of confronting life in its most extreme and intimate relations to death. The sense of brotherhood and solidarity is even more intense among hard-core terrorists who tend to be absolutists and see the world in black and white, us versus them. Of particular interest in understanding recognition through solidarity among terrorists is that they are driven by a sense of solidarity not only with their own immediate group but also with an *imagined community*. Benedict Anderson's theory can well be used to theorize the following characterization of terrorists by Albert Bandura: "Some terrorist violence is carried out by self-appointed crusaders who act on behalf of [an imagined] oppressed people with whom they identify. They are motivated [...] by ideological imperatives and mutual reward of their efforts by fellow members"[6] as well as by recognition from an imagined community of brothers whom they do not know in person. Terrorists typically mobilize the media and launch propagandistic wars to explain to the public their activities and their cause. Such practice is based on the assumption and imagination of the existence of a community of fellow sympathizers—a community which they also seek to expand through their propaganda and acts of terrorism.

II.b. Terrorists' Struggle for Recognition of their Rights

Being accorded rights is crucial to self-respect. Honneth highlights this point by making use of Joel Feinberg's argument that "what is called `human dignity' may simply be the recognizable capacity to assert claims".[7] Terrorist groups often perceive themselves as the "oppressed group" —that is, a group deprived of their rights and human dignity. Being deprived of legal recognition, they attack the state and sabotage institutions associated with the legal establishment—thereby making a symbolic declaration of the invalidity and illegitimacy of existing laws.

6 Albert Bandura. (1990). "Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement", in Walter Reich (ed.) *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologeis, Theologies, States of Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.178.

7 Joel Feinburg. (1980). "The Nature and Value of Rights", in *Rights, Justice, and the Bounds of Liberty: Essays in Social Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

III. The Struggle for Rights according to Insurgent Terrorists and Axel Honneth: Some Continuities

At first sight, it seems as if terrorist activities concretized Honneth's theory about the struggle for recognition. Honneth focuses on the moral dimension in social conflict. Joel Anderson highlights that for Honneth, "'moral' motives for revolt and resistance [...] do not emerge only in the defences of traditional ways of life [...] but also in situations where those ways of life have become intolerable":

> Because key forms of exclusion, insult, and degradation can be seen as violating self-confidence, self-respect, or self-esteem, the negative emotional reactions generated by these experiences of disrespect provide a pretheoretical basis for social critique. [...] the potential emerges for collective action aimed at actually expanding social patterns of recognition.[8]

Terrorists can be interpreted as Honneth's "victims of disrespect", who, by engaging in political action, tear themselves "out of the crippling situation of passively endured humiliation and [help] them, in turn, on their way to a new, positive relation-to-self".[9] Terrorist activities, in other words, can be understood as an attempt to overcome "the diminished self-respect typically accompanying the passive endurance of humiliation and degradation". Through their act of "collective resistance, individuals uncover a form of expression with which they can indirectly convince themselves of their moral or social worth".[10]

Above all, it is Honneth's debt to Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic in formulating his struggle for recognition that brings him close to the terrorists' position. Honneth is inspired by Hegel who locates the hallmark of humanity in human beings' willingness to sacrifice their lives and to give up on self-preservation for the sake of recognition. The struggle for recognition is for Honneth a moral struggle, because it raises a human being above his/her instinct for self-preservation —and only with such a readiness to give up life for dignity do human beings differentiate themselves from other animals. What is at issue in the struggle for recognition is one's honor and humanity rather than "mere life." Self-realization through mutual recognition, rather than self-preservation, is what is at issue for Honneth in theorizing subaltern struggles. Despite

8 *Cfr*. Anderson (n. 6), p. xix.
9 *Cfr*. Honneth (1995, n. 2), p. 164.
10 *Ibid*.

Honneth's attempt to read Hegel's life-and-death struggle "in a metaphorical sense" —in that "a subject is forced to realize that a meaningful life is only possible in the context of the recognition of rights and duties"[11] —his prioritization of dignity above mere self-interest (which necessarily includes the interest of self-preservation) makes it tempting to imagine Honneth as at least theoretically endorsing suicidal bombers who place their honor and the honor of their people above mere life.[12] Interestingly enough, death is a means for terrorists to assert their rights and their equal dignity with their enemies. Death wipes out all the humiliating inequality that exist between the dominating and the dominated. While alive, the powerful and the powerless are unequal. But in death, this humiliating structure of misrecognition is eliminated.

Honneth seems to make intelligible not just the terrorists' suicidal behavior but also their killing of others. On this latter subject, Honneth's source of inspiration is again Hegel —this time Hegel's theorization of crime. Honneth explains how, for Hegel, crime differs from exigency[13] in that it is motivated by the desire for recognition:

> Built into the structure of human interaction there is a normative expectation that one will meet with the recognition of others, or at least an implicit assumption that one will be given positive consideration in the plans of others. [...] The reason why the socially ignored individuals attempt, in response, to damage the others' possessions is not because they want to satisfy their passions, but rather in order to make the others take notice of them. Hegel interprets the destructive reaction of the excluded party as an act whose real aim is to win back the attention of the other.[14]

Honneth's "compatibility" with the terrorists' position seems to be more solidly confirmed by his reference to Sartre as one of his theoretical predecessors. Honneth even cites Sartre's championing of decolonization as an explication of what he means by the struggle for recognition. And, when one thinks of Sartre as a spokesman for decolonization, one cannot possibly overlook his endorsement of violence as a means for liberating the colonized, especially in the context of Algeria.

Honneth speaks approvingly of Sartre's later work where "the

11 *Cfr.* Honneth (1995, n.2), p. 45.
12 A Taliban spokesman, for example, openly declared that his people love death as much as the Americans love life. *Cfr.* Seyla Benhabib (2002) "Unholy Wars", *Constellations* 9 (1): p. 38.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 44; my italics.

struggle for recognition [...] came to be interpreted as a phenomenon that is caused by an asymmetrical relationship between social groups [...] and is, in principle, open to being overcome":

> This historically relativized model of conflict came to dominate the essays Sartre composed on the anti-colonialist movement of négritude in particular (*Situations V*). There, colonialism is understood as a social site that distorts intersubjective relationships of reciprocal recognition in such a way that the participant groups are pressed into a quasi-neurotic scheme of behaviour. The only way that the colonizers can work through the self-contempt that they feel for themselves as a result of systematically denigrating the native people is through cynicism or heightened aggression, and the only way the colonized are able to endure the "common degradation" is by splitting their conduct into the two parts of ritual transgression and habitual over-accommodation ("Introduction to Fanon," 16 f.)[15]

Honneth further follows Sartre's argument about how the asymmetrical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized makes necessary a simultaneous denial and maintenance of relationships of mutual recognition, the result of which is a psychopathology called "neurosis":

> [F]or Sartre, the asymmetrical patterns of communication between the settler and the native that are found in the colonial system represent interactive relations that demand from both sides the simultaneous denial and maintenance of relationships of mutual recognition. For, in order for interaction to be possible at all, the colonial master has to both recognize and disrespect the native as a human person in just the way that the latter is forced into 'laying claims to and denying the human condition at the same time' ("Introduction" to Fanon, 17).

> As a label for the type of social relationship that must result from this reciprocal denial of claims to recognition [...], Sartre introduced the concept of "neurosis" at this point. [...] "neurotic" is meant to designate not an individual behavioural disorder with a psychological aetiology but rather a pathological distortion of relations of interaction stemming from the reciprocal denial of relationships of recognition that are still effective below the surface ("Introduction to Fanon", 18, 19).[16]

The asymmetrical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, in other words, prevents a healthy kind of intersubjective mutual recognition from coming into being. It would seem natural, in

15 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
16 *Ibid.*

other words, for the politics of recognition to endorse the project of decolonization —including the violent kind Sartre sometimes approves of. And if the logic of Honneth obliges him to fully approve of Sartre's position on decolonization, he would have to endorse terrorism in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-centuries also.

The logic of Honneth's argument, in other words, seems to oblige him to endorse terrorism, if terrorism is to be seen as a legitimate means for bringing about decolonization. Terrorism seems all the more continuous with the project of decolonization, when we keep in mind Kofi Annan's description of one of the major faultlines in today's world being the division between the "privileged and humiliated" —those who have all the glorious recognition, and those on whom is imposed the most degrading forms of misrecognition. The following is the Nobel Prize speech Kofi Annan gave in Oslo on December 10, 2001:

> Today's real borders are not between nations, but between powerful and powerless, free and fettered, privileged and humiliated. Today, no walls can separate humanitarian or human rights crises in one part of the world from national security crises in another.[17]

Indeed, 20th-century and especially 21st-century terrorism seem to be triggered by the great asymmetry among different social and political entities and the great imbalance of power which makes impossible a healthy intersubjective mutual recognition between different nations, different races, or different social classes. The discrepancy becomes so intense that terrorist outbreaks seem to be a concretization of what Honneth calls the moral protest of the oppressed launched against the dominating powers.

So far, the logic of Honneth's argument seems to bind him to endorse terrorism. However, this would be the case only if it could fulfil Honneth's requirement of *legitimacy* for any struggle for recognition. However, precisely in terrorists' disregard for legitimacy and normativity, terrorism turns out to be a perversion rather than an exemplification of Honneth's theory concerning the struggle for recognition. Mainly, Honneth insists on the respect for the criterion of legitimacy as the *absolute* foundation on which any struggle for recognition is to be carried out. As he puts it,

17 Kofi Annan, "Nobel Lecture," Oslo, December 10, 2001, 17 November 2009 <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2001/annan-lecture.html>.

> *[R]ights* and social esteem […] represent a moral context for societal conflict, if only because they rely on socially generalized criteria in order to function. In light of norms of the sort constituted by the principle of moral responsibility or the values of society, personal experience of disrespect can be interpreted and represented as something that can potentially affect other subjects.[18]

Expressions such as "rights" and "socially generalized criteria" highlight Honneth's concern for legitimacy and normativity. It is not surprising that in his explication of Honneth's theory, Joel Anderson also foregrounds the sense of indignation provoked by social injustice as made possible by some kind of "normative judgements about the legitimacy of social arrangements":

> the grammar of [the subalterns'] struggles is 'moral' in the sense that the feelings of outrage and indignation driving them are generated by the rejection of claims to recognition and thus imply normative judgements about the legitimacy of social arrangements.[19]

Given that for Honneth, legitimacy and normativity are the framework for allowing the moral grammar of social struggles to unfold, terrorism cannot possibly qualify as a struggle for recognition in Honneth's sense. Terrorists do not recognize state law or international law, nor do they respect the conventions of war which require discrimination between combatants and civilians. If the state is understood in Max Weber's sense as the entity that has "a monopoly on the legitimate use of force", this legitimacy is precisely what terrorism tries to undermine rather than to uphold.[20] In fact, the real target of terrorist attack against the state seems to be precisely this *idea* that the state has a monopoly on the *legitimate* use of violence. Since terrorism is usually employed by a weak party against a strong one, what terrorists seek to undermine in their attack is not so much the might, but the *right*

18 *See* Honneth (1995, n. 2), p. 162; my italics.

19 *See* Anderson (n. 6), p. xii.

20 This is why terrorism often pays no regard to any norms or rules associated with "legitimacy". As Irving Howe, Robert Friedlander, Cindy Combs, and a number other theorists have observed, terrorism involves the deliberate disruption of norms. Interestingly enough, while terrorism is being faulted by ruling parties for not recognizing the legitimacy of the state, the same criticism is much less often launched by them against global capital, which in many ways also demonstrate a lack of respect for the state. In fact, both terrorism and global capital seek to establish themselves over and above the state. More interestingly still, despite first-world governments' tendency to criminalize terrorism while fawning on global capital, supranational terrorism and global capital are often implicated in each other.

of a state.[21] Terrorists deliberately violate the principle that "the state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence" because, in their eyes, the state itself is not a legitimate body in the first place. And it is their outrage at the state's various "illegitimate" and "unjust" practices that the terrorists seek to shock the public into listening.

While terrorists are by and large regarded by outsiders as an illegitimate group,[22] terrorists themselves often see their acts as perfectly legitimate, as the protector of Justice Terrorists openly challenge the legitimacy and authority of the forces owned by the state, seeking to gain public *recognition* instead for the legitimacy of their own cause and their own use of violence to topple what they perceive to be a corrupt regime. However, their notion of legitimacy is messianic, in contrast to Honneth's idea of legitimacy which is grounded in normativity. Terrorists often sacrifice themselves in the name of a grand cause, and it is in that *name* that they seek to be recognized.

In Lacanian language, insurgent terrorists typically dedicate themselves to a big Other which is an emblem of political virtues (for example, Justice and Equality). Oftentimes, terrorist violence is carried out by self-appointed champions of justice who act on behalf of oppressed people with whom they identify. They are motivated, in large part, by ideological imperatives and the reward and approval of their efforts by fellow members. For this reason, terrorists believe that legitimacy is on their side. Terrorists appoint themselves to be the rightful guardians of Justice, in contrast to the state which the terrorists perceive to be a mere corrupt enterprise. In attacking the existing legal and political structure, the terrorists see themselves as serving a higher law and a big Other that has real legitimacy. Leila Khaled, for example, claimed that their terrorist movements are "fighting for humanity—all those who are oppressed and tortured".[23] In other words, the terrorists' struggle is for recognition,

21 Terrorists have to focus on legitimacy issues both for moral and for strategic reasons. As Burleigh Taylor Wilkins explains, "only by appealing to the court of public opinion can terrorists hope to achieve their goals". See Burleigh Taylor Wilkins. (1992). *Terrorism and Collective Responsibility*. London: Routledge, p. 4.

22 The dilemma of the terrorists is that their legitimacy is in many cases being refused recognition not just by the government but also by society at large. This is especially the case when their claim of fighting for human justice is seen by the general populace as being contradicted by their killing of the innocent.

23 Interview, BBC "Man Alive" programme on terrorism 12 June 1975. Leila Khaled is a member of the *Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine*. She became known to the world public when she involved herself in the hijacking of an Israeli airliner over Britain on 6 September, 1970. She was overpowered. According to

rather than for immediate military success. Their immediate goal is public support. They think that if they can undermine the state on the issue of "right", the destruction of its might will follow by the time they have the public on their side. Since the terrorists' immediate goal is to win over public opinion, the "wars" they carry out are generally symbolic wars. In other words, it is the messages being conveyed by the attack rather than their practical destructiveness that is uppermost in the terrorists' minds.

Not unlike Lacan's notion of demand, terrorist activities carry with them a demand for recognition—a demand to have their agent's voice heard or read—and this demand certainly exceeds the need for inflicting significant physical damages on the enemy. To further drive home how terrorist war is at its core a war for recognition, let me draw attention to how terrorists often begin their careers by making speeches and distributing pamphlets. Failing to catch public attention, they then try to bomb the public into listening.[24] As much as the terrorists are driven by idea(l)s, it is ultimately the attempt to gain public recognition for their political idea or message, rather than the material consequences of killing, that they are concerned with in their activities.[25] This is why violence committed by insurgent terrorists is usually "signed".[26]

Politically motivated terrorism carried out against a state in the name of liberation movements is designed to awaken the broader population to an injustice that the terrorists feel only they are sufficiently aware of. Terrorists therefore actively seek publicity for their cause in the effort to enlist popular support for the social or political changes they desire. Terrorists often "perform" for the television to gain sympathy and

Khaled, although she was carrying two hand grenades at the time, she had received very strict instructions not to threaten passengers on the civilian flight. She was held for twenty-three days at Ealing police station, and was released afterwards as part of a prisoners' exchange <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leila_Khaled>.

24 See Richard E. Rubenstein. (1987). *Alchemists of Revolution: Terrorism in the Modern World*. New York: Basic Books.

25 The struggle for recognition is so crucial to terrorist activities that one thinker even defines terrorism as "a strategy, a method by which an organized group or party tries to get attention for its aims, or force concessions toward its goals, through the systematic use of deliberated violence" (my italics). See F. M. Watson. (1976). *Political Terrorism: The Threat and the Response*. Washington-NY: Robert B. Luce Co., p. 1. Typical terrorists are individuals trained and disciplined to carry out the violence decided upon by their organizations. And, if caught, true terrorists can be expected to speak and act during their trials not primarily to win personal freedom, but to try to spread their organization's political ideas.

26 Gianfranco Pasquino. (1996). "Terrorism", *in* The Social Science Encyclopedia, p. 872. London: Routledge.

support for their plight. This generally takes the form of a narrative that presents the terrorists as risking their lives for the well-being of a victimized constituency whose legitimate grievances have been ignored. They often attempt to minimize, or deflect attention from, the harm inflicted through their terrorist acts by centring attention on the injustices perpetrated by the state or the states they are combating.

Since the terrorists' challenge to the state is on the level of ideas and recognition rather than a serious exercise of military force, it is not surprising that terrorism and counter-terrorism always go hand-in-hand with propaganda wars—most notably in the form of media wars.[27] Precisely because what matters uppermost to terrorists is the gaining of recognition for their cause as just, terrorists are eager to seize the mass media as a means of spreading their ideas. Terrorist acts are designed to teach and "educate" the populace through a form of real-life political theatre. The key point here is that terrorists generally do not maintain a distinction between ideas and actions. Their teachings are not articulated in abstract expressions, but are dramatized vividly for their students through concrete examples of terrorist activities in real life. Terrorism itself is theatre.[28] As the nineteenth-century anarchists claimed, terrorism is "demonstration by example" and "propaganda by deed". One can even say that, for the terrorists, it is more important to win the media war than the military campaign. The reason is, so long as the terrorists succeed in

27 The fact that it is the "right" (legitimacy) —and not the "might" (power)— of the terrorists and their opponent that is at issue for the success or failure of a terrorist act explains the two sides' scramble to be the "authoritative interpreter" of the symbolic meaning of the terrorist acts. For example, in the 9/11 attack, the terrorists intended an iconic assault on the United States' military and financial power—and the overbearing, domineering manner in which it was wielded. The Bush administration, however, insisted on reading the act as a declaration of war on civilians and the innocent. Insurgent terrorists challenge the governing power symbolically by seeking to undermine the public's recognition for the state. Terrorists emerge victorious, not when they succeed in destroying certain targets, but when their intended message—that is, their interpretation of their acts and their idea/ideology—win public recognition. In other words, the propagandistic wars between the terrorists and their opponents over the correct interpretation of the symbolic significance of particular terrorist acts amount to no less than their relentless struggle against each other for legitimacy.

28 See Brian Jenkins. (1986). "Statements about Terrorism", in Steven Anzovin (ed.) *Terrorism*. New York: H. W. Wilson Co, pp. 8-17. Cindy Combs. (1997). *Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*. Upper Saddle River, N. J.: Prentice Hall. See also M. Tugwell. (1987). "Terrorism and Propaganda: Problem and Response", in Paul Wilkinson and A. M. Stewart (ed.) *Contemporary Research on Terrorism*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP-Pergamon Group, pp. 409-18.

hijacking the legitimacy of the state, even if the immediate terrorists get eliminated, other people dissatisfied with the state will look upon them as martyrs and perhaps even turn terrorists themselves. By contrast, if the terrorists lose their moral authority and popular support, they will easily disintegrate.

IV. Law, the Moral Grammar of Political Struggle, and Toward a Peaceful Struggle for Recognition

IV.a. Why Terrorism is Not a Viable Means for the Struggle for Recognition

As often as terrorists like to insist on the legitimacy of their own operations as sanctioned by a "higher law", their self-bestowed legitimacy does not really hold, in that law is both based on, and enforces, mutual recognition between equal parties. As Hegel points out,

> Law [...] is the *relation* of persons, in their conduct, to others, the universal element of their free being or the determination, the limitation of their empty freedom. It is not up to me to think up or bring about this relation or limitation for myself; rather, the subject-matter [*Gegenstand*] is itself this creation of law in general, that is, the recognizing relation.[29]

Terrorism is based on anything but mutual recognition and respect. It is an absolutely unilateral violent imposition of one side's will on the other. This is precisely why terrorists can never gain the recognition of legitimacy in Honneth's sense. Not unlike its counterpart state terror, insurgent terrorism is also based on unilateral decisions. Neither insurgent terrorism nor state terror is conducive to peace precisely because both are devoid of legitimacy, and they both lack legitimacy because unilateral decision short-circuits the necessity to respect and recognize the other party's position. It is possible for terrorists to cower their opponent into submission, but such victory by force does not mean that the terrorists can gain the recognition of legitimacy in the world's eyes, less to mention in the eyes of their opponents. It is important to defer conflicts to the law because law is, in Lacanian terms, the third party or the Big Other which breaks up the aggressivity characterizing the two-party imaginary register, and it does so by giving parties of conflicts *equal recognition* through granting them *equal rights*. That way, the

29 G.W.F. Hegel, "Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit", in Leo Rauch (trans. and ed.) (1983), *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6) with Commentary*, p. 111; translation modified by Joel Anderson (n. 6), p. 42.

"losing" side will not feel that it loses because it is being "taken for granted" or casually bullied by its opponent. By contrast, short-circuiting the law reduces the injured to mere victims who feel that their autonomous will has not been consulted: whoever is attacked feels themselves objectified and their dignity compromised.

By privatizing violence, by making unilateral claims about one's own legitimacy, terrorists proceed not on the basis of mutual recognition. Where there is no mutual recognition, one's own claim about one's legitimacy remains an empty claim, since there is no legitimacy unless if it is intersubjectively recognized. If terrorists' goal is to win on the level of "right" rather than "might," if they want to win public support for their position as the injured party making rightful demands, then terrorists' struggle for recognition of its legitimate grievances through violent acts is self-defeating: the means of terrorism compromises its end.

In short, there is no real legitimacy without a party and its practice first being recognized by what Lacan calls the big Other. This is why in the end, insurgent terrorism is incompatible with the philosophy of recognition because law is the foundation for the struggle for recognition. As Honneth points out,

> [A]ll human coexistence presupposes a kind of basic mutual affirmation between subjects, since otherwise no form of being-together whatsoever could ever come into existence. Insofar as this mutual affirmation always already entails a certain degree of individual self-restraint, there is here a preliminary, still implicit form of legal consciousness. But then the transition to the social contract is to be understood as something that subjects accomplish in practice, at the moment in which they become conscious of their prior relationship of recognition and elevate it to an intersubjectively shared legal relation.[30]

"Intersubjectivity" is a key word Honneth emphasizes in his discussion of the philosophy of recognition. And intersubjectivity is precisely what terrorism brackets in its unilateral action against its opponent. Honneth's emphasis on law and legitimacy resonates with Hegel's own position. Hegel thinks that "international law should preserve the possibility of peace —for example, ambassadors should be respected and war be not waged against domestic institutions, against the peace of family and private life, or against persons in their private capacity".[31]

30 *Cfr*. Honneth (1995, n. 2), p.43.

31 Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel. (1942). *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox, §338 and 339. Oxford: At the Clarendon.

Although Hegel in this context is condemning war of aggressions, his disapproval of attacking private citizens would entail that terrorism cannot be legitimized as well. From Hegel's viewpoint, states are represented by armies, which are the proper entities to conduct war. Moreover, war is to be guided by principles derived from the modern idea of right including respect for the property and life of non-combatants. Terrorists violate these ideas of right and are not representatives of legitimate institutional bodies.

Honneth asserts that there is a moral grammar to social struggle. Likewise, we can also say that there is a moral grammar to political struggle, insurgent terrorism being a good case in point. However, it is important to note that for Honneth, law provides the deep structure for that moral grammar. As such, in the end, insurgent terrorism turns out to be a perversion of Hegel and Honneth's philosophy of recognition, and it is a perversion in the Kantian sense of the perversion of the will discussed in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

IV.b. The Root-Cause of Insurgent Terrorism and the Importance of Recognizing the Grievances of the Other

While insurgent terrorists fall short of gaining legitimacy through recognizing the law, the law also risks losing its own legitimacy if it fails to recognize solidarity as one important basis for self-esteem and self-realization. An abstract system of legal codes by itself cannot guarantee equity and as such does not carry enough authority to enjoin a non-violent struggle for recognition. This is why Honneth insists on "context-sensitive forms of the application of law".[32] As he puts it, "the concretization of legal relations [...] [need to] take the particular situation of individuals better into account".[33] In this regard, Honneth is again indebted to Hegel who, along with Guizot, were aware of the need to create institutions that reflected people's passions, interests, and values. Without this sensitivity to will, law could become unjust and even tyrannical.

Careless induction of all people into the same set of legal relations with no sensitivity to particular cultural contexts can be experienced by subaltern groups as a form of imposition and disrespect. Transgression of this legal relation and a deliberate strike at the legal system (such as those launched by the terrorists) maybe motivated by particular groups'

32 *Cfr.* Honneth (1995, n. 2), p.57.
33 *Ibid.*

will to assert their identity and to force the legal establishment to recognize their particularities. Punishment of such transgressions would only intensify the transgressor's feeling of being disrespected and imposed upon. Hegel develops a theory to this effect. His analysis of the desire for recognition as the driving force behind crimes committed by individuals can be adapted to understand the factor motivating terrorist groups and their activities:

> The inner source of crime is the coercive source of the law; exigency and so forth are external causes, belonging to animal need, but crime is directed against the person as such and his knowledge of it, for the criminal is intelligent. His inner justification is coercion, the opposition to his individual will to power, to counting as something, to be recognized. Like Herostratus, he wants to be something, not exactly famous, but that he exercise his will in defiance of the universal will.[34]

Honneth's explication of this paragraph is most relevant for understanding insurgent terrorists' readiness to stake out their lives for recognition—that is, for the dignity of their community. Drawing attention to Hegel's saying "Crime represents the deliberate injury of universal recognition [Anerkanntsein]",[35] Honneth explains that "the motivational cause of such an act lies in the feeling of not having the particularity of one's 'own will' recognized in the application of legal coercion". Honneth goes on to compare this defiance of the legal establishment to the human willingness to give up one's life for honor in the Master/Slave dialectic: "In this sense, what occurs [...] in the case of crime is the same as what occurred (as part of the conditions for the individual formative process) in the case of the struggle for life and death".[36]

Sensitivity to cultural contexts when deciding legitimacy issues is of paramount importance to make possible a non-violent form of struggle for recognition. It is precisely this need to give due recognition to subaltern groups that animates the ending of Seyla Benhabib's essay "Unholy Wars". "Unholy War" is primarily a critique of terrorism. Nonetheless, toward the end of the essay, Benhabib indirectly faults the West for being partly responsible for radicalizing the Muslims by denying them proper recognition and treating them with contempt:

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34 Hegel (1983, n. 30), pp. 130 ff. Hegel (1969) Jenaer Realphilosophie, p.224. Hamburg: Meiner, 1969. Trans. corrected by J. Anderson (n.6), p.53.

35 Hegel (1983, n. 30), pp.131 and 224.

36 *Cfr.* Honneth (1995, n. 2), p. 53.

> Given the global entertainment industry's profound assault on their [the Muslims'] identity as Muslims, and given the profound discrimination and contempt which they experience in their host societies as new immigrants who are perceived to have "backward" morals and ways of life, many young Muslims today turn to Islamism and fundamentalism. Commenting on l'affair folard (the headscarf affair) in France, in which some female students took to wearing traditional headscarfs less as a sign of submission to religious patriarchy than as an emblem of difference and defiance against homogenizing French republican traditions.[37]

The true answer to insurgent terrorism, in other words, is not by force, but to try to understand the terrorists' grievances and their particular contexts, and to, as Honneth suggests, "conceptualize the ethical sphere of the State as an intersubjective relationship in which members of society could know themselves to be reconciled with each other precisely to the degree to which their uniqueness would be reciprocally recognized".[38]

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37 Benhabib (2002, n. 13), p.44.
38 *Ibid.*, p.58.

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